

Risk Management Education

Request for Applications

Frequently Asked Questions

Application Process

What is a cooperative partnership agreement?

A cooperative partnership agreement is a type of discretionary grant RMA awards when it determines it must have substantial involvement with the awardee in order to meet the objectives of a program. Substantial involvement may include ongoing Agency participation in the project; very close collaboration with the awardee, and/or possible intervention or direct operational involvement in the review and approval of the successive stages of project activities.

NOTE: For the purposes of this publication, whenever the term “grant” is used it will also mean cooperative partnership agreement. The laws, regulations, policies, and requirements in this document for awarding grants are also applicable to cooperative partnership agreements, unless program statutes or regulations stipulate otherwise.

Risk Management Education Division (RMED): RMED has three cooperative partnership programs. The purpose of the Commodity Partnerships Program (CFDA 10.457) is to deliver training and information in the management of production, marketing, and financial risk to U.S. agricultural producers. The program gives priority to educating producers of crops currently not insured under Federal crop insurance, specialty crops, and underserved commodities, including livestock and forage. This program provides the recipient with funds, guidance, and the substantial involvement of RMA to carry out these training and informational efforts for agricultural producers through the formation of partnerships with public and private organizations. The purpose of the Targeted States Program (CDFA 10.458) is to deliver crop insurance education and information to U.S. agricultural producers in certain States that have been designated as historically underserved with respect to crop insurance. The states, collectively referred to as Targeted States, are Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wyoming. This program provides the recipient with funds, guidance, and the substantial involvement of RMA through the formation of partnerships with public and private organizations to carry out these crop insurance education and informational efforts for agricultural producers to be able to understand:

- The kinds of risk addressed by crop insurance;
- The features of existing and emerging crop insurance products;
- The use of crop insurance in the management of risk;
- How the use of crop insurance can affect other risk management decisions, such as the use of marketing and financial tools;
- How to make informed decisions on crop insurance prior to the sales closing date deadline; and
- Recordkeeping requirements for crop insurance.

The purpose of the Small Sessions Program (CFDA 10.459) is to deliver training and information in the management of production, marketing, and financial risk to U.S. agricultural producers through small educational sessions. The program gives priority to educating producers of crops currently not insured under Federal crop insurance, specialty crops, and underserved commodities, including livestock and forage. This program provides the recipient with funds, guidance, and the substantial involvement of

RMA to carry out these training and informational efforts for agricultural producers through small educational sessions.

How do I obtain information about RMA’s discretionary cooperative partnership agreement programs?

There are several ways that you can get more information about the discretionary cooperative partnership agreement programs at RMA:

The World Wide Web. You can access information on discretionary cooperative partnership agreement funding by program office and by types of programs available by logging on to RMA’s Web site at: <http://www.rma.usda.gov/aboutrma/agreements/> Click on the link by RME program office.

Grants.gov is a central location on the Internet that allows prospective grant applicants to find and apply for funding opportunities across the federal government. Applicants can search for information on different topics and review posted synopses of grant opportunities from 26 federal agencies, and apply for a grant. RMA continues to increase the number of programs that will use Grants.gov to receive electronic applications. Applicants can access Grants.gov at: <http://www.grants.gov/>.

Applying for a cooperative partnership agreement from RMA is not a complicated process, but it does require that you give us specific information to enable us to consider your application fairly and completely. When you apply for discretionary funds, you must provide us with information on two or more different forms. This section identifies some of these forms, why each is needed, how to get copies of them, and where to send them.

How do I apply for funding from RMA’s discretionary cooperative partnership agreement programs?

To apply for funding under one of RMA’s discretionary cooperative partnership agreement programs, you should first obtain an application package and follow the instructions in the package. You will be required to complete and submit to RMA by a specified date and time certain standard forms, a narrative description of the project, and a budget or cost estimate for the proposed project’s activities.

What is an application package?

An application package contains all of the information and forms that you will need to apply for funding from RMA. Application packages typically include the application notice, program regulations and/or legislation, and application instructions and forms. These forms include the Application for Federal Assistance or SF 424, as well as the certifications and assurances needed to apply for funding.

How do I get an application package?

Individuals interested in applying for a cooperative partnership agreement can download a paper application package from RMA public Web site at:

<http://www.rma.usda.gov/aboutrma/agreements/>. Click on the link by the RME program Office.

Furthermore, applicants can obtain program information and apply for cooperative partnership agreements online using Grants.gov, the government-wide shared electronic application system, which is discussed below. Instructions for using the system is located on the site's home page at: <http://www.grants.gov/>.

Can I apply for an RMA cooperative partnership agreement online?

Yes. RMA is currently using Grants.gov to post information on all funding opportunities and is receiving applications for selected programs through the portal. These activities are part of an effort to consolidate and streamline grant-making activities across the federal government to make it easier for the public to find and apply for federal discretionary grants and cooperative partnership agreements.

What are funding priorities or special emphasis topics?

For some programs, RMA publishes funding priorities or special emphasis topics in the Federal Register and Grants.gov to identify the activities that will be funded in a given year. Funding priorities or special emphasis topics are used as a way of focusing a competition on the areas for which the administrator is particularly interested in receiving applications.

If you are considering submitting an application, be sure to read carefully all the material in the application package to identify any published priorities or special emphasis topics.

Whom do I contact if I have questions concerning the application?

RMA's application packages contain detailed instructions on how to complete an application. However, if something is still not clear to you after reading the instructions, you can contact the person listed in the application notice published in the Federal Register and Grants.gov notices.

What are indirect costs and the indirect cost rate?

Indirect costs are costs an organization incurs for common or joint objectives, which cannot be readily and specifically identified with a particular grant or cooperative partnership agreement project or other institutional activity. Many applicants request funds for indirect costs that they incur while doing the work of a project under a federally funded program. Such costs are usually charged to the grant or cooperative partnership agreement as a percentage of some or all of the direct cost items in the applicant's budget. This percentage is called the indirect cost rate.

All of RMA cooperative partnership agreement programs have a restricted indirect cost rate (10%) that stipulates the amount of indirect costs that can be charged to the cooperative partnership agreement regardless of the rate that was negotiated with an organization's cognizant agency.

I'm trying to fill out the SF-424, Application for Federal Assistance. Where do I find the information for Blocks 8c, 11, 12, 13, and 19?

Block 8c, Organizational DUNS Number. Received from Dun & Bradstreet, provides a D-U-N-S Number, a unique nine digit identification number. Do not wait until the application deadline to request this number. Information can be obtained at the website <http://fedgov.dnb.com/webform/displayHomePage.do>

Block 11, Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance Number (CFDA) and title. The CFDA Number and Title are listed at the beginning of each RFA in the Federal Register notice.

Block 12, Funding Opportunity Number. If applying using paper applications, leave blank. If applying using Grants.gov, this number is located at the beginning of the Grants.gov notice.

Block 13, Competition Identification Number. If applying using paper applications or using Grants.gov, leave blank.

Block 19, Is Application Subject to Review by State Under Executive Order 12372 Process. Each State has different requirements for applicants. Applicants should contact the State Single Point of Contact (SPOC) for Federal Executive Order 12372 within their State to determine whether the application is subject to the State intergovernmental review process. Visit this website for contact information: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/grants/spoc.html>

How do I find out information about the Central Contract Registry (CCR)?

Visit this website: <http://www.ccr.gov/>

I do not lobby. Am I required to submit the OMB Standard Form LLL, "Disclosure of Lobbying Activities"?

Yes. Indicate N/A in blocks 10a and 10b.

How detailed should the budget summary be?

You must provide a budget narrative that relates to the information you provide on SF-424A, "Budget Information, Non-Construction Programs". This information will be used by the panel to compare the likely benefits of the project to its costs. It will also be used by agreement monitors to determine whether the funding requested by you is reasonable for the effectiveness of the project and allowable under Federal regulations.

For each budget category on SF-424A, provide a detailed breakdown of all costs. Include explanations of any cost that may appear to be excessive. Salaries of project personnel should be requested in proportion to the effort that these personnel devote to the project. An example is located in the Application Kit in the Supplemental Guidance for RME-1 form.

What are performance measures?

RMA is moving toward creating a performance-oriented application process that focuses on selecting applications that are structured to meet program performance measures and to yield data that will demonstrate achievement of program outcomes. All cooperative partnership agreement projects selected for funding must show accountability for the federal dollars they receive. To determine project outcomes, RMA requires applicants to use one or more performance measures, which demonstrate evidence of progress in achieving project objectives. In addressing selection criteria, applicants must provide the measures required for the project as well as their targets. Additionally, they must describe the data collection and analysis methods they will use to provide data for each of the program measures, and provide convincing evidence that the proposed approaches are appropriate to yielding the intended data. Successful applicants will be required to submit results of the project to the National AgRisk Education Library (<http://www.agrisk.umn.edu/>) for posting.

An applicant's proposed designs for collecting and analyzing data on performance measures and targets must align with the reporting requirements of the final report. The data collection must also meet OMB guidelines and the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995.

Congress enacted the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 to minimize the burden that the Government imposes on the public and to improve the quality and use of Federal information.

Where do I send the completed application?

If you are submitting a paper application, you should follow the instructions in the application notice. Paper applications are sent to the RME office listed in the Federal Register notice. If you are applying for using Grants.gov, your application will automatically be forwarded to the appropriate program office when you have completed and submitted your application. You must follow the instructions provided in the Federal Register notice and/or application package.

What happens if I miss the application deadline?

To be assured of consideration under a cooperative partnership agreement competition, a paper application from an eligible applicant, with all forms and required paperwork, must be received by the deadline date and time (or the "closing date"). RMA has an absolute policy of accepting no applications that are not received by the deadline (date and time) for a particular program's competition. If a paper application is received late, the application will be rejected. RMA will not notify the applicant that the application was not considered until after the awards are publicly announced.

In addition, for applicants applying electronically using Grants.gov, RMA will not accept applications submitted after the deadline date and time specified in the application notice.

What if there are technical problems with Grants.gov on the application deadline date?

If you are prevented from electronically submitting your application on the application deadline date because of technical problems with the Grants.gov system, RMA will not extend the deadline. When using Grants.gov to apply, RMA strongly recommends that you submit the online application at least two weeks prior to the application due date in case there are problems with the Grants.gov website and you want to submit your application via a mail delivery service.

What if I find an error or realize I have omitted something in my application after the deadline?

In order to assure fairness to all applicants, RMA does not allow an applicant to submit additional materials after the deadline.

What happens to an application once RMA receives it?

When RMA receives a paper application, the program office records each application, assigns it an identification number, sends a confirmation notice to the applicant, and forwards the application to the appropriate program office, which screens the application for eligibility and completeness.

Electronic applications submitted via Grants.gov will receive a Grants.gov tracking number upon submission, which is both displayed in the on-screen confirmation message and sent via e-mail to the applicant. Once Grants.gov validates the application successfully, RMA will automatically pull the application and assign an identification number that will be sent to the applicant via e-mail.

How is my application reviewed?

Applications will be evaluated using a two-part process. First, each application will be screened by RMA personnel to ensure that it meets the requirements in this announcement. Applications that do not meet the requirements of this announcement or are incomplete will not receive further consideration during the next process.

Second, applications that meet announcement requirements will be considered by a review panel that will meet to discuss the merits of each application.

What could cause my application to not be reviewed by the review panel?

Announcement requirements include these reasons for an application to be rejected:

- Applications that request Federal funding of more than the maximum award amount;
- Single applications proposing to conduct educational activities in more than one RMA Region or Targeted State;
- Applications that do not contain substantial involvement by RMA;
- Applications from ineligible or excluded persons;
- Applications that do not address the required awardee tasks;
- Applicants that do not demonstrate a non-financial benefit;
- Incomplete applications; and

- Applications received after the deadline date and time.

What happens if my application is not eligible?

If an application does not meet the eligibility criteria for the particular program it addresses, RMA notifies the person who signed the application that the application is not eligible and will not be considered. The notification will not be sent until the awards are publicly announced. The notification from RMA explains the reason(s) the application was not reviewed in the competition.

How does the review panel consider my application for funding?

For the majority of RMA's cooperative partnership agreement competitions, program offices use application reviewers (reviewers) from within RMA, other federal agencies, and outside the federal government who have expertise in the subject area(s) of the applications being considered. Each reviewer reads and scores a group of assigned applications. After the reviewers score the applications, RME staff carry out an internal review to ensure that the reviewers' scoring sheets are correctly completed and that the application meets all the requirements of the program.

What criteria do reviewers use to score my application?

Reviewers score each application against the selection criteria stated in the application notice. In reviewing applications, reviewers are not permitted to use additional criteria or consider any other information that is not in the application.

Does a high score guarantee funding?

No. Even if an application ranks high it may not be funded. In some instances, because of the large number of high-quality applications that were received under a competition and because of the limited funds that Congress appropriates for a program, RMA may be unable to fund all of them. In addition, high-scoring applications may not be funded because a program may establish a geographic distribution requirement that limits the number of grants awarded to specific regions of the country. Some applications also may not be funded because of an applicant's poor performance in the past on other federal projects.

Keep in mind that a project is not guaranteed funding until an official Agreement has been signed by the authorized RMA official and mailed to the applicant.

How long does it take RMA to decide on my application?

Although the time varies from program to program, it takes approximately three to four months from the time RMA receives a new application to the time an award is made. RMA must carefully follow its procedures, as well as requirements established by Congress, in reviewing applications and awarding grants. We must assure that the review and award process is fair to all applicants. As RMA adopts new technology, we expect the time required to process applications to be reduced.

How do I learn that my application has been funded?

An RME staff person will contact the prospective awardee to inform the individual or organization of the award. RMA also informs applicants when an application is not evaluated or not selected for funding. This notification will not be sent until the awards are publicly announced. An application is not considered funded until RMA sends an applicant a signed Agreement. Drawing down funds under a cooperative partnership agreement obligates the applicant and RMA to the requirements that apply to the cooperative partnership agreement.

Is an application always funded for the entire amount requested?

No. In some cases the application reviewers or program staff determine that certain proposed activities in the application are unnecessary and delete them and their associated costs from the award. In others, the program staff that perform the cost analysis might determine that the amounts requested for particular items are excessive and will reduce them. Funding levels might also be restricted based on the amount of funds appropriated for a particular fiscal year for a program and the number of applications to be funded.